

# Democratic Learning in U.S. Career Education

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper analyzes various U.S. career education programs through a democratic learning framework that adopts three foundational principles: 1) Democratic career education respects student rationality by encouraging student critique and evaluation of course material; 2) Democratic career education includes alternative perspectives on vocationally related issues such as labor market structure, environmental impact and sustainable development, the labor movement and labor history, acceptable working conditions and economic globalization; 3) Democratic career education emphasizes that economic, labor market and working conditions are constructed through human agency and can be reconstructed through democratic participation (Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2001). The authors conclude the reviewed career education programs undermine democratic learning in a variety of ways.*

## Introduction

Consistent with neo-liberal human capital learning assumptions most U.S. schooling jurisdictions now include career education curricula (Hyslop-Margison, 2005). Although career preparatory programs, when appropriately designed, may qualify as education and respect democratic learning principles, there is a troubling tendency for these programs to pursue instrumental, indoctrinatory and ideologically based practices. A concomitant concern arises, then, on how these programs impact on the preparation of democratic citizens.

In this article we review secondary level career education (sometimes referred to as technical or vocational education) programs from California, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota and Mississippi. We provide a brief general description of each program and identify its limitations and possibilities for including democratic learning principles. Following the democratic analysis of state programs we summarize our findings and offer recommendations for policy reform in U.S. career education to strengthen democratic learning practices and citizenship preparation.

## Principles of Democratic Learning

Researchers interviewed, surveyed and tested more than 90,000 14-year-old students in 28 countries, and 50,000 17 to 19 year-old students in 16 countries. The research indicated that classroom practice significantly influences the future political participation of students (Torney-Purta, Schwille and Amadeo, 1999). In *Democracy and Education* Dewey (1916) also argued that classroom instruction bears directly on the formation of democratic citizenship dispositions among students. Formal content and classroom instruction inevitably combine to determine whether career education is democratic or indoctrinatory in format. Hyslop-Margison and Graham (2001) identified 3 key principles that distinguish democratic career education from

indoctrinatory and ideological programs:

- Democratic career education respects student rationality by encouraging student critique of course material;
- Democratic career education includes alternative perspectives on vocationally related issues such as labor market structure, environmental impact and sustainable development, the labor movement and labor history, acceptable working conditions and economic globalization;
- Democratic career education emphasizes that economic, labor market and working conditions are constructed through human agency and can be reconstructed through democratic participation.

These three principles of democratic learning promote agency by providing students with knowledge about labor market conditions, workplace designs, workers' rights and the ability of workers to help shape their occupational experience. Alternatively, the human capital discourse that dominates career education portrays occupational preparation as an instrumental practice. This approach undermines the ability of students to act as agents of democratic social and workplace change. Career education based on the principles of democratic learning views humans and society as unfinished and, therefore, subject to evaluation and transformation. As historical subjects, students possess the democratic right to influence occupational and labor conditions and, in the process, potentially create a more just, stable and rewarding vocational experience. From a democratic perspective, we cannot encourage students to accept passively an ahistorical representation of the world that portrays social, economic and labor market conditions as fixed and unchangeable, and reduces their role to mere structural adaptation (Kincheloe, 1993).

## **A Synopsis of U.S. Career Education**

### *California*

In 2007 The State Board of Education approved the secondary level California Career Technical Education (CCTE) Model Curriculum Standards, a document that describes what should be taught in the state's secondary career and technical education program. According to state curriculum standards, —Standards describe what to teach, not how to teach it" (Bruton, 2006). This understanding affords teachers the opportunity to respect student rationality and avoid the ahistorical presentation of social reality. However, career education would be better served if democratic teaching approaches were explicitly advocated in the formal curriculum rather than simply being left up to individual teacher discretion.

The CCTE connects student career aspirations to the knowledge and skills required to obtain employment in their chosen vocational field. CCTE standards also provide students with the option of pursuing advanced postsecondary study. The CCTE program discusses industry sectors such as agriculture and natural resources; arts, media, and entertainment; engineering and design; fashion and interior design; education, child development, and family services; and marketing, sales, and service. These occupational sectors are selected based on perceived student interest and projected areas of employment opportunities. Once a student chooses a sector, then more detailed knowledge concerning the pathway options within that area is provided.

The curriculum boasts high academic standards in terms of provided resource materials and assessment protocols. These standards are divided into two categories within each sector: 1) foundation standards; and 2) pathway standards. There are 11 foundation standards that a student must complete to succeed in the program: Academics; Communications; Career Planning and Management; Technology; Problem Solving and Critical Thinking; Health and Safety; Responsibility and Flexibility; Ethics and Legal Responsibilities; Leadership and Teamwork; Technical Knowledge and Skills; Demonstration and Application.

### *Kansas*

The Kansas secondary level career and technical education program is divided into sixteen sectors: agricultural, food and natural resources; business, management and administration; health science; education and training; finance; marketing sales and service; information technology; and architecture and construction. The design of the Kansas Career Education webpage is indicative of the fundamentally fractured and confusing nature of the program itself. The first page of the website requires the student to select one of the above categories (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008) without any general overview of program content or statement of aims and objectives. There is no overarching theme to act as a unifying principle that conveys the general sentiment and philosophy on the role, limitations and responsibilities of secondary career education as a field of inquiry. Each section simply conveys an instrumental description of work responsibilities and the skills required to perform each job.

### *Kentucky*

The Kentucky Department of Education has implemented a program entitled Pathway to Careers. The program starts at the middle school level and then continues into secondary school. At the middle school level, the program is described as “~~exploratory~~” because it reviews a wide variety of career choices available to students. In secondary school, students are initiated into networking activities, job search strategies, and a more in-depth “~~exploration~~” of various employment sectors. To complete the program, students choose a specific career path and participate in a Career Work Experience (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998). “~~Incorporated~~ in the Pathway to Careers curriculum are basic concepts of human relations, life skills, overview of career clusters and opportunities for work-based learning” (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998, n.p.). The program employs a multifaceted approach that encourages students to become acquainted with various aspects of the contemporary workplace without any discussion on how workers might influence workplace design and conditions.

The Pathway to Careers program is comprehensive, made up of five distinct courses that are connected to specific grade levels: 6-9th Grade: Career Choices; 9th Grade: Career Options; 10th Grade: Career Networking; 11th Grade: Career Major (students may pursue careers in one of the fourteen career clusters) or Career Work Experience; 12th Grade: Career Major: Students may pursue courses in one of the fourteen career clusters or Career Work Experience (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998). The courses progress by scaffolding one set of “~~employability skills~~” upon a previous set. The early skill sets are actually more appropriately described as dispositions and the skills become technical after the student enters a particular occupational

sector.

### *Minnesota*

Minnesota's Career and Technical Education (CTE) "contributes to the overall education of Minnesota citizens through its emphasis on strong technical and occupational skills" (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004, n.p.). This process purportedly contributes to the economy, family, and the community. In the interest of promoting citizenship, the CTE facilitates "lifelong learning" through the integration of practical skills and knowledge. This program also supposedly promotes "genuine learning," and "authentic accountability": capacities evaluated by the following five criteria: 1) CTE standards that are industry-specific and have very precise expectations concerning the learning of students; 2) Learning that is evaluated through behavior (students should "show what they know"); 3) Learning that is facilitated through connections with business, industry, and community groups; 4) Student organizations are encouraged that involve students in forums to discuss their experiences in the classroom and to network with other members; and 5) Coordinating industry-based standards with high school curricula to better prepare students for the work force.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, career planning is made up of "career awareness, exploration, and development" (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004, n.p.). The program allows students to discover career interests through reflection, projects, and workplace experience. Students discover career opportunities through self-assessment of their strengths, weaknesses and interests. Career exploration is achieved through field trips, job shadowing, mentoring, entrepreneurship and internships (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). Like the other programs under review, there is no discussion of how students as future workers might contribute to the labor market and working conditions they encounter.

### *Mississippi*

Making it Work: Mississippi's School to Careers (STC) Initiative, similar to its counterparts in other states we examined, aims to equip students with the necessary employability skills to enter the workforce. This initiative is geared toward enhancing the career preparation of both teachers and students in the hopes of making the classroom experience relevant and applicable (Williamson & Drake, 2002). The program is intended to bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace, as well as eliminate overlap between education and training programs (Office of School to Careers, 2002).

The program eliminates duplication in education and training programs, maximizes the effective use of resources, supports locally established occupational initiatives, requires measurable performance goals, and offers flexibility in meeting those goals (Williamson & Drake, 2002). The program also attempts to create a synergy between schools and other state programs that prepare students for future employment. K-12 students consider career possibilities and receive a practical skill base to proceed "seamlessly" into the job market. Making it Work is geared toward the younger student population, grades four to eight, and teachers are expected to make the program as practical as possible by integrating real life workplace experiences into the classroom (Office of School to Careers, 2002).

## Democratic Threats in U.S. Career Education

One persistent problem with career education programs is their collective failure to help students and workers understand the social construction of reality (Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2001). Social facts such as contemporary labor market conditions are distinguishable from brute facts since the former always emerge from conscious human decision-making (Searle, 1995). When career education naturalizes current social, economic and labor market conditions the democratic participation of students in shaping structural conditions is potentially undermined. The naturalization of social reality as fixed and inexorable in career education is also ideological since it conveys to students that their role is one of passive compliance rather than active participation in structural design. Only the California career education program we reviewed in this study discusses the possibility of worker generated structural labor market or occupational change, leaving every other program with a significant ideological and indoctrinatory component.

Another area where U.S. career education undercuts the principles of democratic learning is the various “skill” constructs advocated by the programs we reviewed. For example, the construct of critical thinking in CCTE, a potentially democratic instructional practice, is poorly articulated and reduced to an instrumental form of thinking that limits problem solving to workplace situation applicability. The critical thinking approach in U.S. career education reduces academic competencies to mere procedural and declarative knowledge that ignores relevant structural issues related to occupational experience.

Hyslop-Margison and Armstrong (2004) point out that critical thinking in career education is exclusively portrayed as a problem solving strategy to generate technical solutions to workplace problems and the programs we reviewed confirm this observation. This construct of critical thinking promotes instrumental rationality by encouraging students to address problems from a perspective that ignores wider workplace, labor market, and socio-economic issues. When students are discouraged from critiquing the social and economic forces shaping contemporary vocational experience, their democratic right to participate in directing these forces is threatened. CCTE students are typically expected to think within pre-established frameworks that severely limit the opportunity for divergent thinking about labor market or workplace organization.

The stated purpose of Kansas Career and Technical Education according to Technology Education Program Standards is “to prepare students to comprehend and contribute to a technologically based society” (Haugness, 2003). The program objectives narrowly focus on the integration and training of students regardless of the occupational sector. Such a narrow vocational focus at the secondary school not only limits the future occupational options of students, but also situates them in an entirely compliant and passive relationship to the working conditions they “comprehend”. There is no mention of workers in the Kansas program as interactive agents who exercise a legitimate voice in the democratic construction of their vocational experience, or any suggestion of critiquing a technologically based society.

Kansas Career and Technical Education, similar to the other programs we reviewed, fails to include any discussion of labor history or workers’ rights. A program respecting the democratic principles of learning might devote an entire unit to industrial relations, including subsections on arbitration and conciliation, work determination, trade union and employer

organizations, government regulations and industrial laws, human rights and the labor market, and the legal rights and moral obligations of workers and corporate interest groups within a democratic society.

In 2008 the Kansas Department of Education released a series of documents aimed to study, review and renovate the state's Technology Education program. The first section, Promoting: Comprehensive Redesign with Integration & Partnerships (Kansas State Board of Education, 2008) suggests the program requires change to meet "21<sup>st</sup> century skills". Some of the capacities used to describe 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner Characteristics include Technological Fluency, Communication, Analytical & Thinking Skills, Collaboration, Leadership, Self-Direction and Reflection, Interpersonal Skills, Initiative and Ambition, Solve Complex Problems, Adaptable, Versatile" (Kansas State Board of Education, 2008). By suggesting that students, and therefore future workers, should be adaptable and versatile reflects the democratically problematic assumption that students/workers should not question occupational instability or other negative aspects of contemporary working conditions.

The naturalization of unstable workplace conditions is overtly ideological since it advocates unconditional structural compliance. Such imperatives constitute a direct assault on the principles of democratic learning. The Kansas Career Clusters Implementation Plan, reflecting a similar view, states that one "21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill" is being prepared to work "40 – 15 Jobs" in a lifetime (Kansas State Board of Education, 2008). By instilling the view in students that job instability is morally acceptable and structurally unavoidable, it denies the legitimate possibility that workers may question the ethics of work displacement and democratically influence their working conditions to strengthen occupational stability.

The Kentucky career education course attempts to remain sensitive to student career aspirations by making the connection between personal interests and the skills required in that particular vocational area. Some of the learning outcomes include the ability to demonstrate employability, to develop an awareness of the current labor market, and to identify personal skills pertaining to the labor market. Unfortunately, these imperatives also implore students toward passive orientation to prevailing structural conditions. The description of Career Choices provides an example of the goals set forth by the curriculum:

This course is designed for middle school students and introduces them to a broad range of career opportunities available in today's society. It includes assessment of students' aptitudes and abilities, interests, and learning styles in order to assist them in identifying careers and planning a career path. Instruction will also provide opportunities for student interaction with professionals through field trips, shadowing, and mentoring. (Kentucky Department of Education, 1998)

In the work experience phase of Kentucky's Pathway to Careers students are invited to experience genuine workplace situations. The co-op program affords the opportunity to apply abstract work related knowledge to concrete occupational circumstances. However, the practical experience phase lacks a de-briefing process for students to discuss the practical occupational component. Once again, then, there is no opportunity for students to reflect upon and critique workplace conditions beyond simple adaptation to employer expectations.

Kentucky career education programs predictably include multifaceted skill development. There is a concerted effort to integrate many types of skills into the program so that students acquire a variety of employability skills such as communication and critical thinking: —Besides the technical competencies, each local course competency profile must include competencies in math, science, language arts, and projects that reflect real world and relevant learning activities that promote higher-level skills” (KCEP, p. 19). The focus of all program employability skills remains instrumental in nature. The employability skills discourse routinely appropriates the tools of critical pedagogy to assuage the concerns of educators uncomfortable with the monolithic vision of education as human capital preparation. By appropriating concepts such as critical, thinking, problem solving and communication it transforms critical education aims into purely instrumental objectives (Hyslop-Margison, 2000).

Minnesota’s Work-Based Learning (WBL) is an education program that provides students with opportunities to enhance “career awareness, explore career options, and develop critical thinking skills” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2004). WBL is defined as any work and learning experience that happens both in school and work settings. The objective of this learning component is based on the perceived need to remain “competitive” in a global economy. What this account of the global economic and competition omits is the actual incentives that encourage corporations to locate in particular regions. Often the primary reason for corporate location has far more to do with a readily available cheap labor market and minimal environmental regulations. The competition career education tends to promote is between workers themselves for the plethora of low-paying, low benefit and self alienating forms of work offered by the only two sectors predicting employment growth: the retail and service sectors. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) describes the situation this way:

Despite the endless rhetoric about how the jobs of the year 2000 will need employees with much higher levels of [skill], the greatest future demand in the labor market appears to be for armed guards, fast food preparation personnel, truck drivers, sanitation workers, nurses’ aides, and other relatively unspecialized tasks. (p. 122)

Minnesota’s Career and Technical Education neglects to discuss its view of democratic citizenship and what related values are instilled through its career training programs; the concept of “citizen” is added to the document only in reference to economic productivity. This narrow concept of citizenship does not discuss social values, social action, or social responsibilities, but is instead narrowly construed as citizen as worker/consumer. Such a depiction of citizenship undermines democratic education since it objectifies students as mere tools of material production and consumption, and displays a clear lack of respect for student rationality and democratic agency in constructing vocational and social experience.

The “exploration” encouraged by this document provides students a potential space to pursue their interests in terms of selecting a career path. However, “exploration” is framed according to the perceived needs of the industry. In other words, students pursue their interests in accordance with current industrial and economic requirements rather than their own existential aspirations related to vocational experience. The Minnesota document clearly suggests that student “exploration” should be completed through the lens of current economic trends. Students

are not respected as autonomous rational agents who choose their own labor market and workplace experience, but are simply expected to internalize predetermined workplace values and respond to prevailing labor market demands.

Minnesota's Career and Technical Education (MCTE) is so directed toward workplace experience that there is a complete lack of theoretical discussion regarding how economies operate and their corresponding social implications. Perhaps the most flagrant example of the program's instrumental learning objectives is in the construct of lifelong learning. The neo-liberal discourse driving career education programs such as MCTE characterizes lifelong learning as a teachable disposition that encourages students to accept personal responsibility for job retraining in the face of labor market instability. Social reality is correspondingly depicted as something created and controlled by others, and career education students are portrayed as objects whose primary responsibility is reduced to meeting contemporary labor market needs. The agenda that accompanies this line of thinking is silent on the dynamics of social and personal transformation and premised on the assumption that —democratic” citizenship is contained by the parameters of market economy objectives (Hyslop-Margison & Naseem, 2007).

The Mississippi Department of Education (Office of School to Careers, 2002) Making it Work program is designed to initiate students into the requirements of the labor market. This early intrusion into general education is designed to prepare learners for the labor market but it also begins a more clandestine process of osmotic indoctrination. This form of indoctrination is analogous to ideological manipulation since it is embedded in a discourse that legitimizes the structures, institutions and assumptions supporting the prevailing social and economic hegemony (Raywid, 1984). Hence, from the earliest stages of their schooling experience students confront an educational message that normalizes a constructed social reality and instrumental career training for a predetermined workplace context.

### **Democratic Career Education**

In California a potential democratic strength of the CCTE curricula is the introduction of students to a broad range of career opportunities. Dewey (1916) initiated the idea that vocational study should broaden the base of potential career opportunities rather than limit them. Based on their interests, students explore components of various occupations, gaining general and specific knowledge about that particular occupation. This approach affords students the possibility of self-selecting a career based on their own existential inclinations and interests after acquiring the necessary broad-based information to make an informed and authentic choice.

In the formation of CCTE standards, the California State Board of Education consulted and collaborated with many groups, including post-secondary educators, industry, educational organizations, legislators, students and families. In theory, this broad based participation of various stakeholders should foster a more democratic career education program. Under the Investigation and Experimentation Standards, for example, students are expected to analyze a science-based social issue by researching the literature, analyzing data, and communicating the findings. Examples of issues include irradiation of food, cloning of animals by somatic cell nuclear transfer, choice of energy sources, and land and water use decisions in California. The potential ecological issues raised in this area by a skilled instructor could draw student attention



to a wide range of social, cultural and economic values, and consider how these forces impact on the environment. The potential for student praxis also exists if students are presented with the opportunity to recommend policy change to the appropriate government officials.

The Historical Interpretation and Research Standards also ask students to distinguish valid arguments from fallacious arguments in historical interpretations and to identify bias and prejudice in historical interpretations. Students show the connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and the larger social, economic, and political trends and developments. These imperatives also open up clear democratic possibilities by affording the students an opportunity to exam neo-liberal trends and their impact on labor market and workplace conditions.

There are a number of other standards in the California program that support democratic learning practices in career education:

- Students trace the evolution of work and labor, including the demise of the slave trade and the effects of immigration, mining and manufacturing, division of labor, and the union movement;
- Students analyze the emergence of capitalism as a dominant economic pattern and the responses to it, including Utopianism, Social Democracy, Socialism, and Communism;
- Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights;
- Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society;
- Students analyze issues of international trade and explain how the U.S. economy affects, and is affected by, economic forces beyond the national borders;

The above standards respect the principles of democratic learning by affording students the opportunity to investigate work, union and labor history, including the struggle by the labor movement to ensure the fair treatment of workers and women. By providing students with multiple ways of viewing the world, and building a historical understanding of the domestic and global economy, students understand that many individual problems related to work are structurally generated. They may also identify popular historical inaccuracies and examine a wide range of contemporary workplace and labor market issues.

While these standards represent significant strengths of CCTE, each of the above standards only applies to particular sectors. So, for example, while reading the standard “Verify and clarify facts presented in other types of expository texts by using a variety of consumer, workplace, and public documents” is common across all sectors, “Trace the evolution of work and labor, including the demise of the slave trade and the effects of immigration, mining and manufacturing, division of labor, and the union movement” is only a standard in the Finance, Information and Marketing sectors. Our only concern, then, is the above standards are presently too limited in program scope and should be extended as rudimentary expectations throughout all areas of CCTE.

Kentucky’s Career Education is distinguished from other programs by “Connecting Activities” that bridge the knowledge based education students receive in classes to the technical

and practical training that occurs in Career Work Experience. Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) were created to provide a forum where students can meet other students, hone their leadership skills, and have more opportunities to work with technical equipment: —The goals of career and technical student organizations are to develop leadership, improve social awareness, develop awareness of technology as a vocation, strengthen citizenship skills and, to understand and promote the effective and ethical applications of technology” (CTSO, p. 24). Although CTSOs provide students the opportunity to meet and learn from other students, the focus of this forum is entirely industry based and directed. For example, the curriculum emphasizes technology as an indispensable tool only to the extent it promotes corporate determined objectives and the concept of citizenship is linked entirely to capitalist production.

Despite the overall lack of respect for context, there is a glimmer of community consciousness that infuses the Kansas Education Program Standards: —Agricultural Education programs will respond to community needs and Kansas’ agricultural needs” (Haugness, 2003). The consideration of community needs demonstrates a small, but salient, desire not only to comply with the dictates of the global economy, but to consider local economic and labor market issues as well. The Technology Education Program Standards was developed to coincide with a described shift from ~~an~~ industrial society to a technological society.” The program rationale states:

Technological society functions better when its citizens understand the technology that surrounds and sustains them; indeed, they can make wiser decisions about the development and use of technology. The content and methods of industrial arts are inadequate to prepare individuals to live in a world that is now technological rather than industrial. Technological literacy can be significantly enhanced through appropriate programs of technology education. (Haugness, 2003, n.p.)

The Technology Education Program Standards also suggests the importance of studying ~~the~~ relationships between technology, the individual, and society” (Haugness, 2003). Although these imperatives invite the possibility of democratic critique, they remain primarily abstract suggestions that offer no guidance on how teachers might move such discussions forward. Technology is an important area of contemporary education, but critical questions must be addressed to satisfy the demands of democratic learning. For example, students might be specifically asked to consider the environmental impact of various technologies, how technology affects the workplace and who benefits or loses from the introduction of new work-related technologies.

Mississippi’s Work Based Learning Component is positioned at the conclusion of student high school experience. This program element includes paid, high-quality, work-based learning experiences, and articulates the steps local partnership will take to generate such paid experiences. There are opportunities for students to participate in STC programs in various industries and occupations, including high-skill, high-wage employment opportunities (Williamson & Drake, 2002). The democratic strengths of this initiative include its emphasis on sustainability and local level employment possibilities. We especially applaud the payment of students for work performed. The program could be strengthened by including discussion of the workplace experience, labor laws, workers rights and more general labor market and economic

issues. This initiative more narrowly aims at putting ~~an~~ emphasis on at least one labor shortage in the community” (Williamson & Drake, 2002, n.p.). However, placing an emphasis on community vocational requirements does add a dimension of social consciousness to the initiative.

## Conclusion

Our review of secondary career education initiatives from California, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota and Mississippi reveals a few democratic strengths but unfortunately many more violations of democratic learning principles. A critical thinking approach in career education based on democratic learning encourages in-depth student examination of economic globalization and international trade agreements, explores current working and labor market conditions, and considers how these conditions affect workers and communities. The requirements of a democratically constructed model of critical thinking are linked with respecting the agency and the democratic right of students to shape their vocational experience. Lifelong learning must also be re-conceptualized in democratic career education to create conditions for on-going intellectual growth and self-actualization rather than simply promoting passive job retraining in the face of employment instability.

Every effort should be made in democratic career education to avoid what Eagleton (1991) refers to as ~~an~~ “naturalization”: ~~Like~~ “universalization, naturalization is part of the dehistoricizing thrust of ideology, its tacit denial that ideas and beliefs are subject to a particular time, place and social group” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 59). U.S. career education programs that advocate passive and uncritical student compliance with existing economic and labor market practices naturalize these practices to students. Naturalization undercuts student autonomy since it ~~implies~~ the ability to regulate one’s life by rules which one has accepted for oneself because the rules are both apparent and convincing” (Peters, 1973, p. 197). In the absence of student autonomy, the possibility of democratic career education is seriously undermined.

The California program contains several strengths we strongly encourage other states to consider as a means of protecting democratic learning in their career education programs. The inclusion of labor history and workers’ rights, the exploration of alternative economic systems and a focus on more environmentally friendly and sustainable career choices are but a few of the rich ideas in this program. Although the analysis we completed is not entirely negative, then, there is much reform required in U.S. career education to ensure it meets the criteria of democratic learning principles.

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